

budget as the annual Legislative appropriations bill makes its way through Congress. John frequently served as point man in making sure that we had accurate information and figures as our legislation was constructed.

All too often, Mr. Speaker, in the rush of day to day activities, we elected Members of the House forget the hard work and dedication of House employees other than those in our personal offices. The American people are fortunate to have hard working public servants such as John Straub. In a hundred ways, John has made the House a better, fairer place to work and serve for literally thousands of other public servants.

In closing, besides his many practical accomplishments, Mr. Straub brought to the House a personal style that is both professional and refreshing. He always had a kind word and a smile, and applied boundless energy to every task.

While we in the House are disappointed to lose a person of his caliber, we're pleased that he'll be able to support one of the Nation's pre-eminent education institutions, Harvard University, as Associate Dean for administration of the Kennedy School of Government. On behalf of the members and the institution, we thank John Straub for his service and dedication, and wish him best of luck in his future endeavors.

RETHINKING FIRE IN THE WAKE OF FIREFIGHTER DEATHS

HON. TOM UDALL

OF NEW MEXICO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, July 31, 2001

Mr. UDALL of New Mexico. Mr. Speaker, on July 10, 2001, four of Washington State's young firefighters died battling a forest fire on the Okanogan National Forest. As I have had time to reflect on this tragic event, I have come to realize that wildland fire suppression continues to be a dangerous and risky operation.

As in previous tragedies such as the Mann Gulch fire in Montana and the Storm King Mountain fire in Colorado, our hearts pour out to the families, friends, and colleagues of those who perished fighting wildland fires. The deaths of Tom L. Craven, Jessica L. Johnson, Karen L. Fitzpatrick, and Devin A. Weaver is a disturbing reminder of Mother Nature's powerful forces and unrelenting risks faced by our dedicated firefighters. Although seventeen firefighters lived, as did two campers caught in the explosive fire, I am grieved by the deaths of these four young people and I do not want this to happen again.

Their tragic deaths raise significant questions—questions that may likely go unasked in the Forest Service investigation: Could these deaths have been prevented through a different systemic response to fire? Should the Forest Service have been expending hundreds of thousands of dollars and risking the lives of dozens of firefighters to fight a fire in a remote canyon that threatened no houses or resources? Would a fire management plan have ensured that the fire would have been handled differently?

The Okanogan fire started in remote backcountry adjacent to a Wilderness Area. The nearest house was at least ten miles

away, the nearest town twenty miles away. While the cause of the fire is not yet known, we do know that the fire began in a designated roadless area. If the forest had a fire management plan in place—as is required by countless agency directives—it is likely that such a plan for the area would have provided alternative strategy options for the Forest Service.

The Okanogan fire underscores the need to re-examine our nation's approach to forest fire and to reframe the terms of debate. In the wake of this fire will come calls to reduce fire risks through aggressive thinning and full funding for fire preparedness. However, this approach merely perpetuates the culture of fire suppression that operates with few fiscal or social constraints. It also serves to exacerbate the risks of fire through fire exclusion. It perpetuates the illusion that we can and should control all fire, regardless of location and ecosystem. These suppression efforts make little sense fiscally or environmentally. A different approach would have the agency stop putting out fires in remote backcountry.

Last year, Congress allocated \$1.6 billion to the Forest Service for implementation of its national fire plan. In addition to working with homeowners to reduce vegetation around their homes, these dollars should be spent on returning fire to its natural role in the ecosystem. We can do this through targeting thinning, prescribed burns, and fire-use policies. We also should be spending money on fire management planning and sensible suppression efforts—ones that do not needlessly endanger lives.

Putting out all fires regardless of location and ecosystem simply puts off the inevitable. The West's forests have burned for thousands of years and will continue to do so. We must learn to live with fire, rather than stepping up the assault on what is still perceived by many as "the enemy." We must stop sacrificing our young people in this futile effort.

I would like to enter into the record the following op ed from the Portland Oregonian that highlights these issues:

[From the Portland Oregonian, July 17, 2001]

DEAD FIREFIGHTERS WERE SENT WHERE THEY
DIDN'T BELONG

(By Andy Stahl)

I write this not long after four young men and women died battling the Thirty Mile fire in the remote Chewuch River canyon of the Okanogan National Forest.

Tom Craven, Karen Fitzpatrick, Devin Weaver and Jessica Johnson were sent by the Forest Service to do a job. They died in the performance of that duty.

But was the job they were doing worth their lives? Did this fire, in a steep, remote canyon that threatened no houses or valuable resources, need to be battled? During its investigation into these tragic deaths, the U.S. Forest Service had better answer these questions.

The Thirty Mile fire started in roadless, backcountry land immediately adjacent to the remote Pasayten wilderness. Perhaps the fire started from an unattended campfire; the investigation has yet to pin down the cause.

The fire began in a designated Research Natural Area, at 6,000 acres, one of the largest RNAs in the nation.

This is important in what happened next: It appears fire managers did not even know the fire was in a Research Natural Area. Had they known, they would not have aggres-

sively attacked the fire with aerial retardants and firelines, which are banned in RNAs. Instead, they would have held back and taken a more cautious approach to fighting this fire—an approach that sought to allow the fire to mimic natural processes within this fire-dependent ecosystem.

Admittedly, hindsight can be 20-20, but it is worth considering that a more cautious approach to fighting this fire might also have saved lives.

The Thirty Mile fire exemplifies the need to take a hard look at our nation's approach to wildland fires. A century of aggressive fire suppression, combined with logging of the biggest and most fire-resistant trees, has damaged ecosystems throughout the West. Continuing to put out every fire in the remote backcountry makes little sense economically or environmentally. We must carefully restore fire to its prominent role as nature's cleansing agent in our public forests.

Last year the Congress allocated a record amount, \$1.6 billion, to the Forest Service for its national fire plan. The first priority should be to help private homeowners who live near fire-prone national forests to manage the vegetation within several hundred feet of their houses. That's where the biggest difference is made between a home burning up in a forest fire and a home surviving. The next priority should be to return fire to its natural role in the environment.

Putting out all fires simply puts off the day of reckoning. Burn today or burn tomorrow, the West's forests have burned for thousands of years and will continue to do so.

We must learn to live with fire just as we live with the weather. And we must stop sacrificing our best and brightest young people in this futile war against an implacable enemy.

COMMEMORATING ROTARY INTERNATIONAL AND ITS NEW PRESIDENT, RICHARD KING

HON. FORTNEY PETE STARK

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, July 31, 2001

Mr. STARK. Mr. Speaker, on July 1, 2001, Richard King, of Fremont, California, was officially named the 2001–2002 president of Rotary International, one of the largest volunteer organizations in the world. Mr. King is a trial lawyer and a member of the Rotary Club of Niles. A Rotary club member since 1968, Mr. King has served as a trustee of The Rotary Foundation and director and chairman of the Executive Committee of Rotary International's board of directors. He has been an active spokesperson at Rotary functions in more than 75 countries.

Rotarians are represented in more than 160 countries worldwide and approximately 1.2 million Rotarians belong to more than 29,000 Rotary Clubs. The main objective of Rotary is service in the community, in the workplace and throughout the world. Rotarians develop community service projects that address many critical issues, such as poverty, hunger, illiteracy, the environment, violence and children at risk. They also support programs for youth, educational opportunities and international exchange for students, teachers, and other professionals, and vocational and career development.

The Rotary motto is Service Above Self. As Richard King assumes the helm of leadership,